



McGovern-Dole Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program in Timor-Leste

HATUTAN Sustainability Study Liquica

August 2024

Executive Summary

Improving children's nutritional outcomes is a [national priority](#) for the Government of Timor-Leste. In 2007, the Ministry of Education (MOE) set up a national School Feeding Program (SFP), aimed at increasing student attendance, addressing nutritional needs, and stimulating the local economy. Starting in 2018, USDA's McGovern-Dole Food for Education and Child Nutrition (FFECN) initiative has supported Timor-Leste through the HATUTAN program, providing a holistic intervention to boost SFP efficiency, improve literacy teaching practices, boost the adoption of positive health, nutrition, and hygiene practices, and strengthen the production of nutritious foods by local farmers. Between 2018-2023, HATUTAN reached a total of 431,244 students across four municipalities and resulted in a five-percentage point increase in literacy scores. In 2023, 101 schools in the municipality of Liquica graduated from the program, including 35 schools receiving a full suite of interventions.¹ This study explores post-graduation results in enrolment, attendance, teaching practices, school management, and community savings groups in Liquica one year after the end of the project.

The findings demonstrate the robust sustainability of HATUTAN's achievements and continued post-graduation improvement. Student enrolment has increased 41% since the baseline, and attendance rates have increased by five percentage points (from 74% to 79%), including after HATUTAN's support ended. Teacher attendance has also continued to increase, reaching 93% compared to 56% at the baseline.

The provision of school meals through the national SFP has reached 100% of the graduated schools, compared to 1% at the baseline, demonstrating the increased efficiency achieved through policy changes put into effect in 2023. Moreover, most schools have increased the dietary diversity of meals, with 91% providing protein-rich foods, 82% providing protein-rich foods of animal origin (eggs, meat), and 64% including green leafy vegetables in school meals. The results demonstrate a strong commitment of school-level SFP Management Teams to ensure nutritional diversity in meals, particularly in a context of rising inflation and food prices. Universal access to meals by students also seems to be a major driver of improved enrolment and attendance in schools that graduated from the HATUTAN program.

Literacy teaching practices have continued to improve after graduation. The proportion of teachers using individual student reading activities has increased from 64% to 91% after graduation. Overall, 64% of the teachers are using reading corners during instruction, nearly duplicating the final evaluation result (36%). Teachers are also increasingly using more gender-equitable practices.

Conversely, schools continue to struggle with poor hygiene practices. Despite some improvement in relation to the final evaluation, nearly a third of students are not washing hands with soap prior to meals. Additionally, the use of formative assessments and individual support

¹ HATUTAN provided a full suite of interventions to rural and remote schools, including activities focusing on education, health, hygiene, school meals, economic empowerment, and guidance on agriculture in addition to SFP support. HATUTAN provided a partial suite of interventions – SFP support and associated trainings – to schools in central and urban locations.

to non-participating students by teachers remain low. Participatory governance continues to be weak, requiring further mobilization of PTAs and increased access to grants.

All savings groups in the Liquica school communities have remained functional, with 86% of Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) members contributing savings during their last meeting, resulting in robust savings and loan portfolios. Over 60% of the VSLA groups have continued to receive support from Community Development Agents following the end of the program.

The results show that school communities have managed to maintain similar or higher result levels despite a scenario of rising food insecurity, inflation, and climate-related disasters. Overall they demonstrate the effectiveness of HATUTAN's integrated approach in developing the capacity, motivation, and conditions for sustainable results after graduation.

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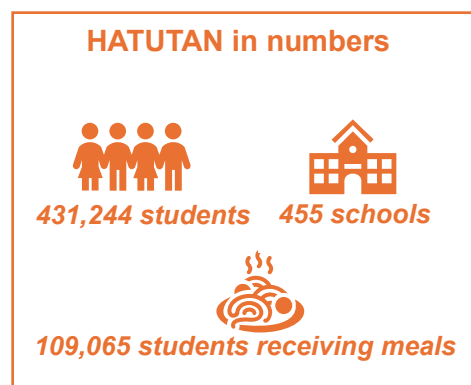
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Acronyms

CARE	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
CU5	Children Under Five
EJP	<i>Ekipa Jestaun Programa Merenda Eskolár</i> / School Feeding Program Management Teams
HATUTAN	<i>Hahán ne'ebé Atu fó Tulun ho Nutrisaun no Edukasaun</i> / Food to Support Nutrition and Education
KONSANTIL	National Commission for Food Security in Timor-Leste
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
MoE	Ministry of Education
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
SFP	School Feeding Program
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
VSLA	Village Savings and Loans Association

Introduction

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has supported Timor-Leste through the **McGovern-Dole Food for Education and Child Nutrition Initiative** since 2018. The McGovern-Dole funded *Hahán ne'ebé Atu fõ Tulun ho Nutrisaun no Edukasaun/ Food to Support Nutrition and Education program – HATUTAN* - supported 455 schools and surrounding communities in four of Timor-Leste's most disadvantaged municipalities: Ainaro, Ermera, Liquica, and Manatuto. Between 2018 and 2023, HATUTAN reached 431,244 students, out of whom 109,065 received school meals.



To implement HATUTAN, CARE, Mercy Corps, and WaterAid partnered with the Ministry of Education (MoE), the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, and the National Commission for Food Security (KONSANTIL) to implement a holistic program package, including:

-Support to the implementation of the national School Feeding Program (SFP), supplementing national funding through the provision of US-donated commodities and technical assistance to the MoE and other government partners to address policy and implementation bottlenecks.

-Interventions to strengthen literacy instructional practices, including teacher mentoring; provision of supplementary learning materials and strengthening book lending in schools; school administrator mentoring; and implementation of literacy and health-focused extracurricular activities.

-Health, nutrition, hygiene, and gender-focused training and coaching to school leaders, Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), and Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs), seeking to boost the adoption of improved practices at school and household levels.

-Strengthening farmers' capacity to expand the production of nutritious food items for school meals and household consumption, including training in climate-resilient agriculture, nutrition, and engagement in VSLAs.

These interventions respond to critical barriers to child development and education outcomes in Timor-Leste. As of 2020, 47% of children under five (CU5) were stunted, 8.6% wasted and 32.4% underweight,² with the highest stunting rates observed in Ermera (63%), Ainaro (60%) and Oé-Cusse (57%).³ In HATUTAN's targeted municipalities, dietary diversity remains extremely low (2.8 out of 9)⁴, with grade 2 students primarily consuming carbohydrates (100%) and leafy vegetables (74%).⁵ The consumption of eggs and flesh foods by students remains minimal, at 4% and 12%, respectively.⁶ Malnutrition contributes to low attentiveness and affects cognitive development, with

² Ministério da Saúde (2020) *Timor-Leste Food and Nutrition Survey 2020*, pg. 19-23

³ Ibid, pg.21

⁴ Consilient (2023), pg.103

⁵ Ibid, pg.107

⁶ Ibid

28% of rural students in HATUTAN municipalities reportedly facing difficulties remembering and concentrating.⁷ As of 2023, illness and natural disasters contributed to low attendance rates in grade 2 (64% for girls, 63% for boys), affecting learning outcomes.⁸

HATUTAN's intervention improved overall literacy scores by five percentage points over and above the comparison group, supporting students to overcome COVID-19 learning losses.

Improving nutritional outcomes remains a national priority for the Government of Timor-Leste (GoTL). The country set up its national SFP in 2007 and became a member of the Scaling Up Nutrition/SUN Movement in 2020. While the national SFP has been publicly funded since 2007, multiple issues have affected delivery, with meals often not being provided during the entire school year and not complying with nutritional guidelines.⁹ HATUTAN's baseline (2019) showed that only 1% of all assessed intervention schools had served meals on the day of the survey, which took place at the beginning of the school year.¹⁰

HATUTAN's final evaluation show that the integrated intervention has achieved remarkable results, including:

- A gain of 4.8 percentage points in literacy scores, over and above the comparison group.¹¹
- A major reduction in teachers' use of traditional practices: the proportion of students who spent the class copying from the board declined by 15 percentage points over and above the comparison group, while the proportion of students repeating after the teacher declined by 25 percentage points;¹² and
- A major improvement in infant feeding practices, reducing by 13.6 percentage points in the proportion of mothers feeding formula to babies under six months of age.¹³

In 2023, the schools¹⁴ in the municipality of Liquica – 101 in total, out of which 35 receiving the full intervention¹⁵ - graduated out of the program following demonstrated improvements in school management, SFP delivery, increased use of participatory teaching practices and reduction in negative teaching practices, and improvements in hygiene and sanitation. Among other results, the final evaluation showed that 91% of the schools in Liquica had reading corners in grade 2, compared to HATUTAN's 65% average; the average attendance rate reached 78%, compared to a 64% average; and teacher attendance rate reached 85%. The second phase of the program has continued to support schools in Ainaro, Ermera, and Manatuto since 2023, and expanded operations to Oé-cusse in 2024.

⁷ Ibid, pg.168

⁸ Ibid. pgs.69-70

⁹ Burton, L. (2019) *HATUTAN Baseline Evaluation Report*, pg.25

¹⁰ Ibid, pg.75

¹¹ Consilient (2023) *HATUTAN Endline Evaluation*, pg.20

¹² Ibid, pg.46

¹³ Ibid, pg.106

¹⁴ Including 36 pre-primary schools and 65 primary schools.

¹⁵ HATUTAN provided a full suite of interventions to rural and remote schools, including activities focusing on education, health, hygiene, school meals, economic empowerment, and guidance on agriculture in addition to SFP support. HATUTAN provided a partial suite of interventions – SFP support and associated trainings – to schools in central and urban locations.

Objective

The present study seeks to understand post-graduation patterns in school communities targeted by HATUTAN at Liquica municipality, approximately a year after program activities ended in this location. Specifically, this study seeks to respond to the following questions:

- Did the schools manage to maintain the coverage and nutritional value of meals through the national SFP after graduating from the program?
- How did graduation affect student enrolment and attendance?
- How sustainable were the changes in school management and teaching practices observed in HATUTAN's final evaluation?
- How did savings groups fare after the end of program support?

The findings will provide insights on the sustainability of HATUTAN's interventions and inform adaptations to HATUTAN II's activities. The findings will also inform post-graduation support by the GoTL and will contribute to the global body of knowledge on sustainability of the strategies adopted by McGovern-Dole funded programs.

Methodology

Sample. This study took place in eleven schools which graduated from the HATUTAN program in 2023. All schools are located in the administrative post of Maubara, in the municipality of Liquica. The school sample replicates the sample used for the final evaluation (2023) allowing for a pre-post comparison of results with the final evaluation findings.

The study used a **quantitative methodology** with three data collection tools, specifically: a structured classroom observation; a school survey; and a survey of village savings and loans associations (VSLAs). The main respondent for the school survey was the head teacher, while the main respondent for the VSLA survey was the VSLA group chairperson.

Data Collection took place by a group of external enumerators with prior experience in using the quantitative tools under the supervision of staff currently employed by HATUTAN II - HATUTAN's follow-on program. HATUTAN II's MEL Manager provided two days of refresher training to the enumerators, including in-depth tool reviews, safeguarding, research ethics, and data quality assurance procedures. The enumerators collected data from June 25 to July 1, 2024.

Final Sample

Classroom Observation: The enumerators observed a total of eleven classes (55% male, 45% female teachers). With the exception of one teacher, who had worked at school for one year,¹⁶ all other teachers had between three and twenty-one years of experience teaching at the assessed school. Only grade 2 literacy classes were observed, in line with the evaluation protocol.

¹⁶ Similarly, at the final evaluation for HATUTAN, one teacher had taught at the assessed school for less than a year.

School Survey: Eleven schools assessed at the baseline and final evaluation were recontacted for this study. Responses were provided by school coordinators (ten male, one female).

Village Savings and Loans Associations/VSLAs. A total of 24 VSLA participants responded the survey, out of whom 58% are women. The respondents included chairpersons (71%), treasurers (25%) and a member (4%).

Limitations. The findings from this study refer only to the schools targeted by HATUTAN in Liquica and cannot be generalized to non-targeted schools in Liquica, or nationwide.

Findings

Enrolment and Attendance

The average enrolment has increased substantially since the baseline – from an average of 188 students per school to an average of 265 students per school, or a 41% increase. The average attendance rate one year post graduation is 79%, compared to 74% at the baseline (74%) and 78% at the final evaluation. The results show a positive and sustained trend in attracting more students, which is likely to be associated with the increased availability and quality of school feeding (see below).

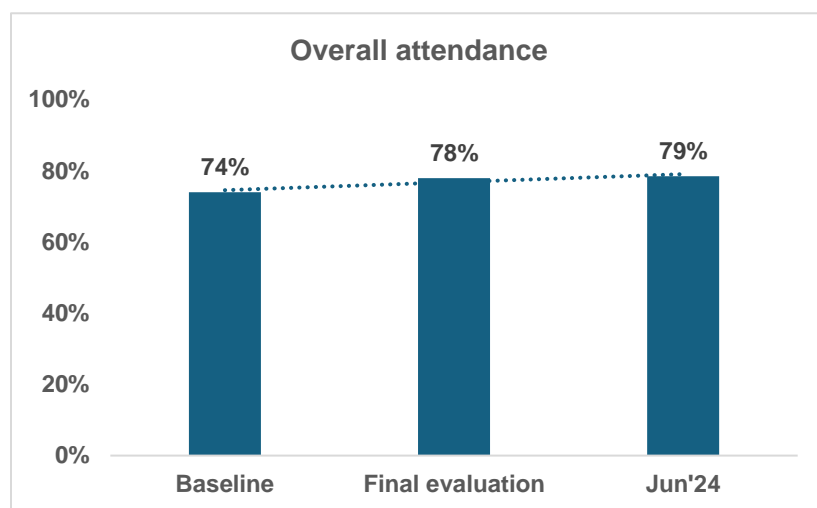


Figure 1: Trends in Attendance

The average number of students attending grade 2 classes has increased dramatically since the baseline. In 2019, the average number of students present in class was 23.5. As of 2024, this has increased to 39.1 (verified through headcounts). The result shows that in addition to a sizable increase in recorded enrolment in early grades, there was also a substantial increase in the number of students physically present in class in relation to the baseline. The average attendance rate among grade 2 students is 77% (78% boys, 75% girls) compared to 75% at the final evaluation.

It is also noteworthy that the attendance rate in grade 2 (77%) is similar to the average of 79%, in a context where attendance rates are typically much lower in early grades.

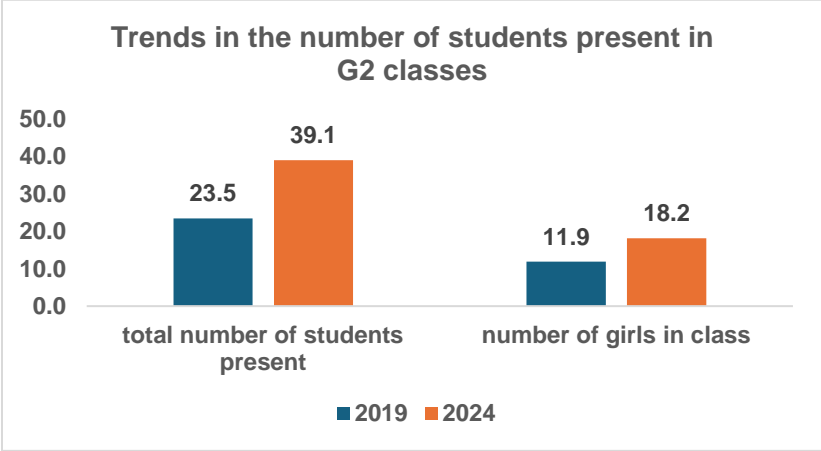


Figure 2: Trends in Grade 2 Attendance

Classroom Practices

The **availability and use of reading materials** has increased over time. All assessed grade 2 classes (100%) had a reading corner, compared to 91% at the final evaluation. In 64% of the observed classes, the teacher used the reading corner during class compared to 27% at the baseline and 36% at the final evaluation.

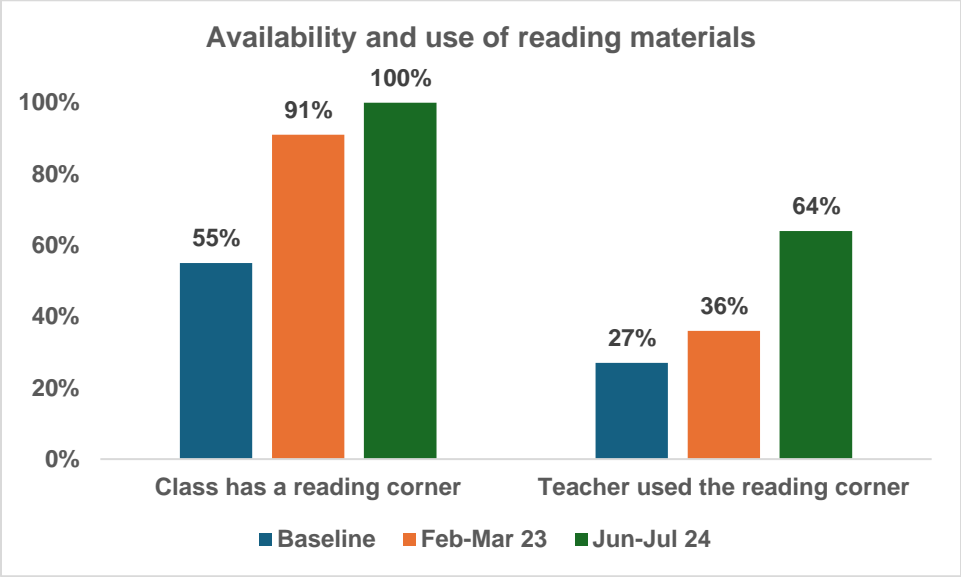


Figure 3: Trends in the Availability and Use of Reading Materials.

Teachers have sustained and even increased the use of **improved literacy teaching practices** over time. In 91% of the classes, teachers assigned individual reading tasks to students, with a marked increase in relation to the final evaluation (64% - see graph below). In 91% of the classes, the teachers read to the students, sustaining the same level of use of this practice as during the final evaluation.

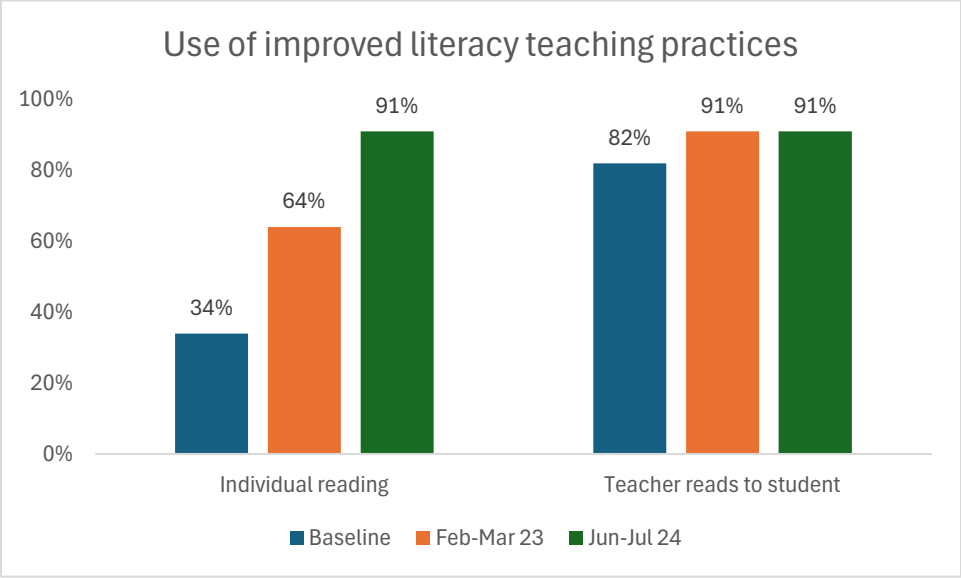


Figure 4: Trends in the Use of Improved Literacy Teaching Practices

Conversely, the **use of traditional teaching practices** remains highly prevalent. In 55% of the classes, the students spent most of the time copying from the board, while in 82%, the students spent most of the time repeating after the teacher. Comparatively, at the final evaluation, only 36% of the students spent most of the time copying from the board and 55% spent most of the time repeating after the teacher. The result shows an erosion of the gains observed at the final evaluation, indicating the need to reinforce teacher coaching/ training in these areas.

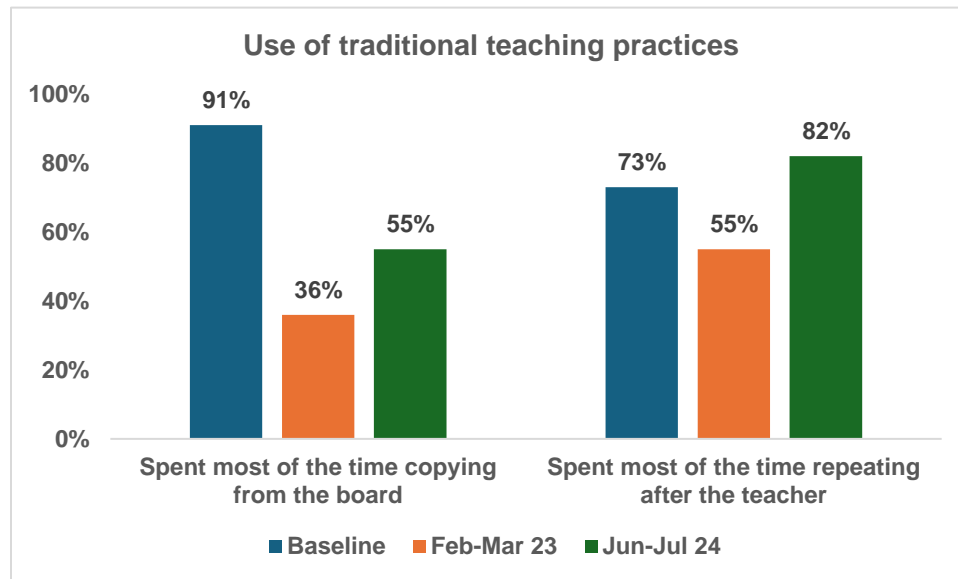


Figure 5: Trends in the Use of Traditional Teaching Practices

While teachers are adopting **student-centered practices**, trends vary across those. The proportion of teachers asking questions of students (100%) remained the same as in the final evaluation and the use of group work¹⁷ has systematically increased since the baseline, reaching 64% of the teachers. The use of other student-centered practices has declined. Overall, 55% are using games and exercises, compared to 91% at the final evaluation, although the use of the practice remains higher than at the baseline. Slightly more than half of the teachers (55%) sought to engage non-participating students, compared to 73% at the final evaluation. Only 27% of the teachers were observed asking students' opinions – half of the 55% observed doing so at the final evaluation. Additionally, none of the students asked questions of teachers, suggesting that children are not comfortable doing so. These results indicate the need to reinforce less used practices, particularly the engagement and individual attention to non-participating students.

¹⁷ Not including group reading, which is measured separately.

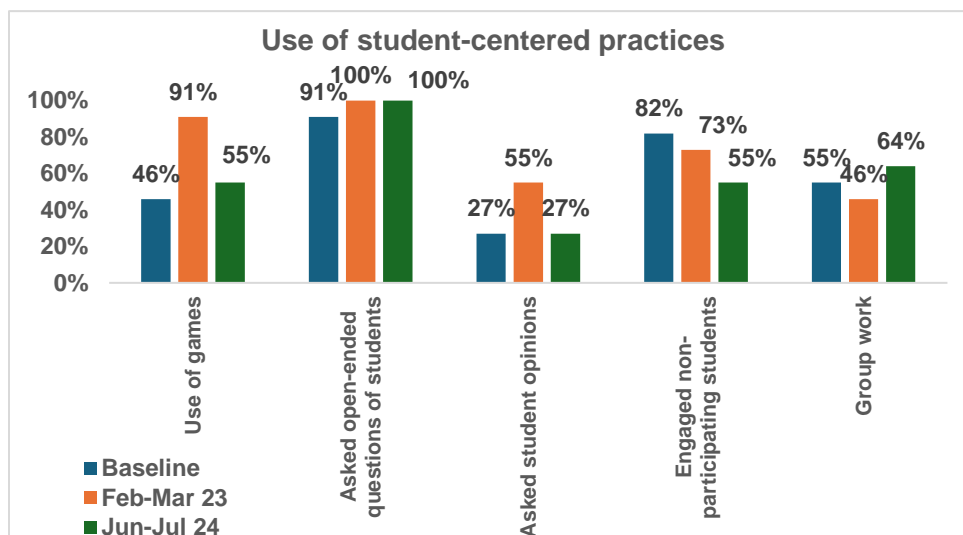


Figure 6: Trends in the Use of Student-Centered Teaching Practices

None of the teachers had records of formative assessments, although 18% affirmed using those. The use of formative assessments was already low at the final evaluation (when 18% of the teachers had records of formative assessments) and is clearly an area for further reinforcement by the MoE/GoTL.¹⁸

Gender. In 36% of the schools, girls had less access to resources (e.g., desks, books) than boys, compared to none at the final evaluation and 18% at the baseline. It is likely that the sharp increase in attendance in 2024 (see above) has resulted in competition for resources, exacerbating gender disparities. The finding highlights the need to work with school management to identify and address gendered practices, while also ensuring the availability of sufficient furniture and learning materials for all students in parallel with the provision of school meals, mitigating the potential negative consequences of increased enrolment and attendance.

In comparison, **the use of gender-equitable practices in class has continued to increase over time**, with major improvements in relation to the baseline and final evaluation. The proportion of teachers providing encouragement/ positive feedback to students has increased for both boys and girls. Since the baseline, the proportion of teachers encouraging girls has increased sharply – from 18% to 73%. The proportion of teachers encouraging boys has also increased – from 55% to 82%. Gender disparities remain – the proportion of teachers encouraging boys (82%) remains higher than the proportion encouraging girls (73%) – but the gender gap has narrowed since the baseline (when 55% of teachers encouraged boys compared to 18% encouraging girls).

The same proportion of teachers are asking questions of male and female students (82%). However, when compared to the baseline, the proportion of teachers asking questions of girls

¹⁸ Including the potential engagement of inspectors in reinforcing the use of formative assessments and providing further guidance to administrators on their use.

has increased dramatically – from 27% to 82% - compared to the proportion of teachers asking questions of boys (64% to 82%).

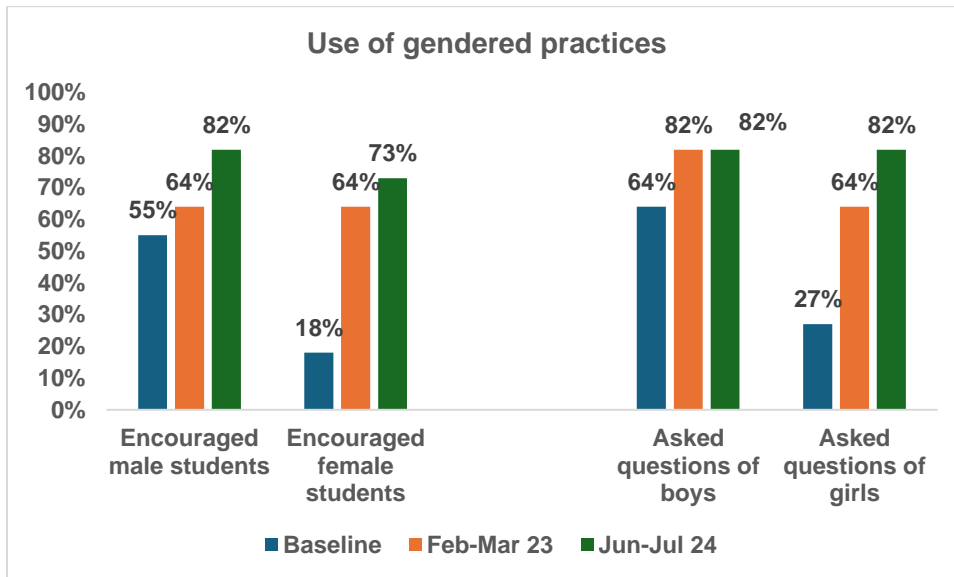


Figure 7: Trends in the Use of Gendered Classroom Practices

Negative Teaching Practices. Enumerators observed one teacher (9%) shouting at students, while another teacher (9%) used derogatory language with a student. The use of verbal violence has decreased in relation to the final evaluation - when 36% used harsh language against boys - and the baseline, when data collectors observed 27% of teachers shouting at/ insulting students. Enumerators did not observe any cases of corporal punishment in this study or during the final evaluation,¹⁹ compared to 9% at the baseline.

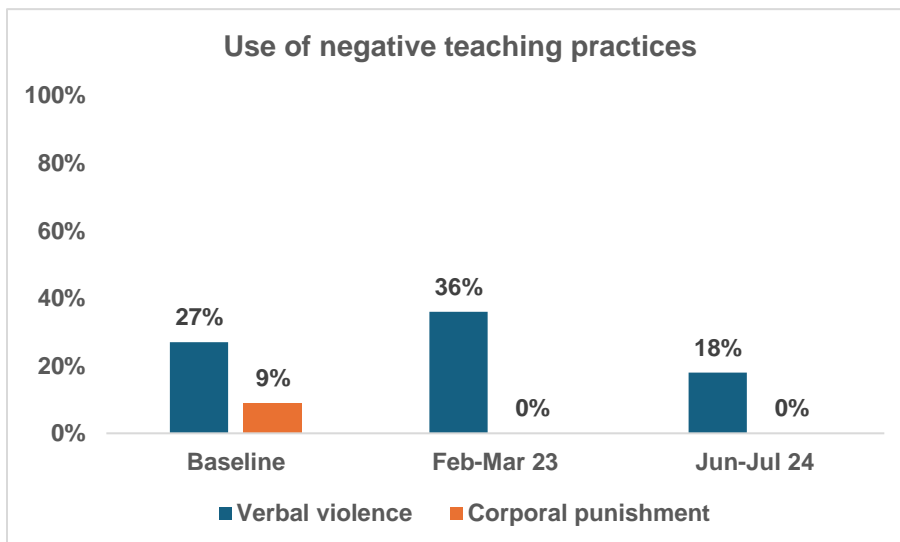


Figure 8: Trends in the Use of Negative Teaching Practices

¹⁹ While this is a positive finding, it is also likely to reflect desirability bias.

School Practices

Provision of School Meals. In contrast with the final evaluation when none of HATUTAN's targeted schools were providing meals due to a funding delay, and with a mid-year assessment conducted in 2022, when 49% of the schools in Liquica served meals, the enumerators observed school meals being served in all assessed schools. The result demonstrates the increased efficiency of the SFP after the policy changes implemented in 2023, which allowed for faster access to SFP funds at municipal level and improved decentralized management of the program.

Overall, 100% of the schools included carbohydrate-rich foods in the meal; 91% served protein-rich foods, including 82% serving protein of animal origin²⁰; 64% provided green leafy vegetables; 55% served orange-fleshed vegetables; and 34% served fruits. Access to meals and their nutritional value has clearly improved over time. None of the schools/ meal preparation groups had an agreement with farmers for the provision of food for meals during the time of this study, however, as well as none at the final evaluation, indicating the need to reinforce guidance in this area. Only one of the schools (9%) maintained a school garden and is using the produce for meals.

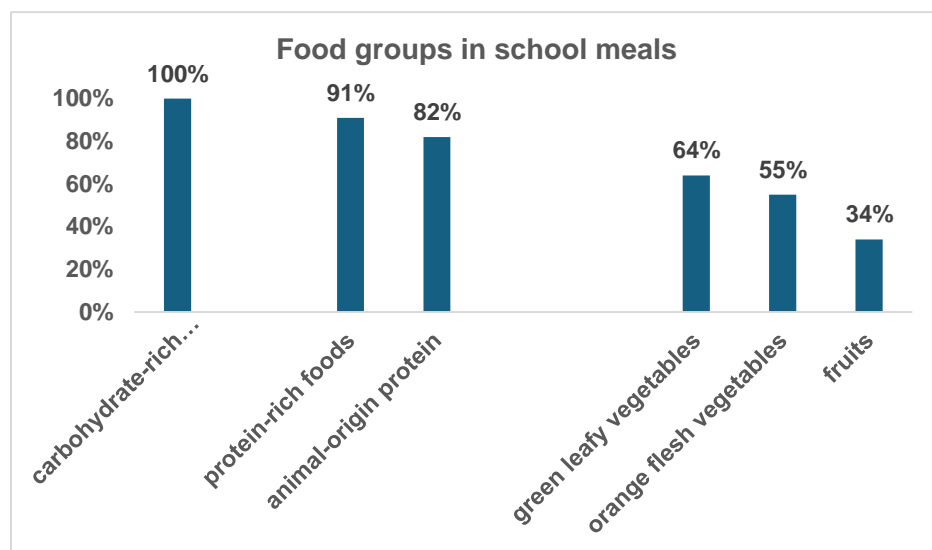


Figure 9: Proportion of School Meals Including Diverse Food Groups

Food Preparation Practices. While hygiene in food preparation remains weak, it has improved in relation to the final evaluation. At the time of the final evaluation, only 18% of the kitchens had handwashing stations, none of which had soap, potentially because of the lack of funds for school meals at that time. As of June 2024, when school feeding was active, still only 36% of the school kitchens had a handwashing station with water and soap. Only 55% of the schools had a handwashing station with water and soap for the students to wash hands before eating. In the schools where the handwashing station was available, 66% of the observed students

²⁰ Including 46% serving meat and 36%, eggs.

washed their hands before eating. The results show substantial gaps in hygiene, despite continued gains.

Participatory Governance. Overall, 100% of the schools have a parent-teacher association (PTA) with more than two members. Nearly a third (31%) of the PTA members are female, and 91% of the schools have at least one female member in the PTA. However, only 18% of the PTAs have more than two active members, and only one school (9%) had received the visit of a PTA member during the week prior to the survey.²¹ During this visit, the PTA member monitored the provision of school meals and student attendance.

Access to Public Funding for School Improvements. Only one school (9%) had received a school grant for school improvements,²² amounting to \$4,188. The school has a School Improvement Plan in place for its utilization, including infrastructure improvements, supplies (teaching, hygiene), and the purchase of sports materials. Limitations in access to public grants are potentially hindering school capacity to purchase basic supplies and address maintenance issues; additionally, the limited availability of funding may also affect community motivation to engage in participatory processes to address infrastructure and maintenance issues.

Book Lending. Only 36% of the schools had book lending records, and only one school (9%) had lent books the previous week. This result represents a substantial decline in relation to the final evaluation, where 45% of the schools had lent books the week prior to the survey. The result highlights the importance of continued reinforcement of messaging by the MoE on establishing book lending systems at schools and use of books outside classroom hours, increasing exposure time to reading. Schools are not formally required to lend books to students; the development of policy guidelines may reinforce this practice.

Extracurricular Activities. Overall, 73% of the schools claimed to have continued to implement extracurricular activities after the intervention ended, compared to 71% prior to the final evaluation.²³ However, when verifying the type of activity, 64% had only conducted general cleaning (i.e. not an extracurricular activity per se), while two schools (18%) had implemented sports-based activities and one school (9%) encouraged students to sing and dance.

Teacher Attendance. The average teacher headcount was 93%, compared to 85% at the final evaluation and 56% at the baseline, showing continued improvements.

²¹ At the final evaluation, 46% of the schools had a PTA meeting less than a month before the survey, and 27% had a PTA meeting the week prior to the survey.

²² The access to school grants was not measured during the life of the project but is mentioned in this study as it represents a critical condition for school maintenance and purchase of supplies.

²³ During the last 2022 monitoring cycle.

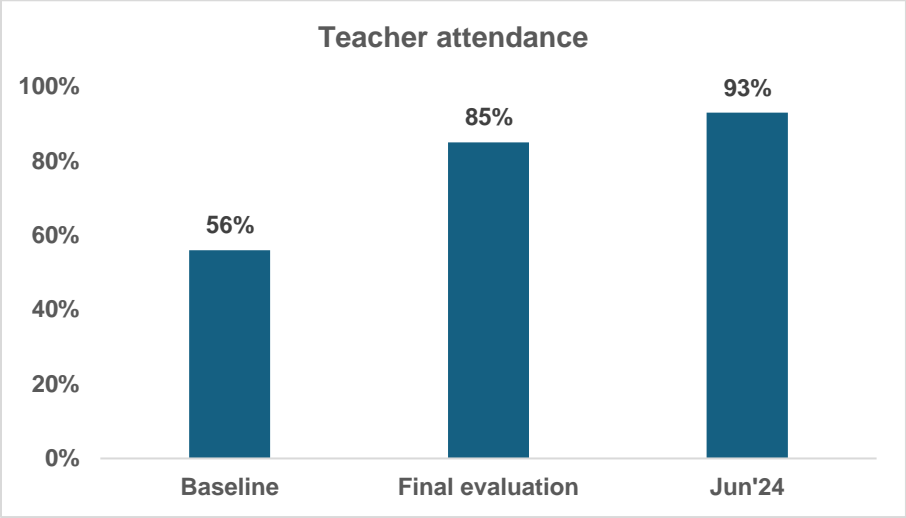


Figure 10: Trends in Teacher Attendance

Hygiene and Sanitation. Overall, 91% of the schools have functional toilets for students, at the same level as the final evaluation. The proportion of schools with toilets for girls’ exclusive use has declined from 91% at the final evaluation to 64% (out of which 55% have toilets with lockable doors for girls’ use). It is likely that the increase in enrolment is forcing schools to use all toilets for both boys and girls, thus requiring further MoE investment in infrastructure to reduce the student-to-toilet ratio. Only 55% of schools assessed have both water and soap for handwashing in or near the toilet, at the same level as the final evaluation.

Savings Practices

All 24 assessed VSLAs have remained active to date. Each group has 19 members on average, of which 13 are women. The number of active members varied between seven and 34. The wide variation in membership is likely to reflect the demographic density in targeted locations and the distance between hamlets in remote, hard-to-access mountainous areas. On average, three members have dropped out, with another three joining since the group started.

Overall, 63% of the groups have continued to receive support from Community Development Agents, and 50% received a visit during the last two months.²⁴ However, 96% of the groups are not receiving support from other programs or organizations, Most VSLAs (93%) have already shared out funds once, with an average amount of \$5,989 disbursed to members.

The average amount saved per group is \$3,990, ranging between a minimum of \$600 and a maximum of \$9,695. On average, 86% of the members have contributed savings during the last group meeting, including 87% of the female group members. Each group had \$2,513 disbursed in loans to members on average, or 70% of the total amount of money saved. The total amount in loans ranged between \$390 and \$7,724, and 79% of members have borrowed from the group. Enumerators observed that all groups had records of savings and loans. At the last monitoring round prior to the end of the project in Liquica, 89% of the members were

²⁴ VSLA members who emerge as natural leaders are identified, trained, and mentored by the program to serve as Village Agents (VAs) who mobilize and train new VSLAs.

contributing savings, with an average savings portfolio of \$3,120 per group and an average loan portfolio of 2,232/group.

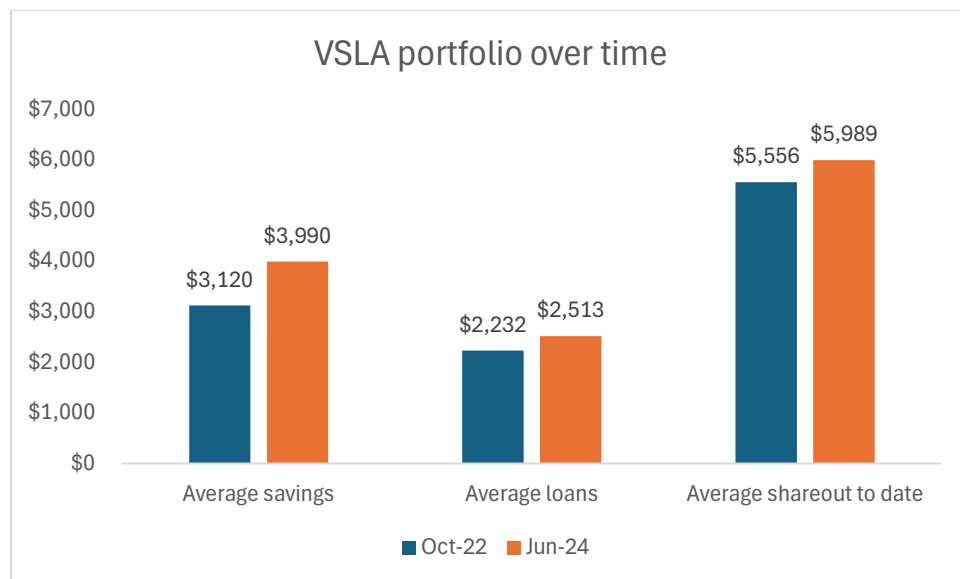


Figure 11: Average VSLA Portfolio Over Time in Graduated School Communities

Overall, 42% of the groups had members defaulting on loans, compared to 18% at the end of 2022. The average of defaulted loans payments amounted to \$1,328 and ranged between \$50 and \$3,060 with an average of eight members per group defaulting on loans. In comparison, at the end of 2022, the average number of group members defaulting on loans was only 1, with the average amount of defaulted loan payments per group being \$83. The pattern is likely to reflect the overall context of economic decline and the impact of the climate crisis on members dependent on small scale farming for a living.

Overall, 29% of the groups have continued to share information on agriculture and 21% continued to exchange information on improved health practices during meetings. These results are likely to reflect the continued engagement with Village Agents.

Contextual Trends

In 2022, the Government of Timor-Leste (GOTL) approved new policy guidelines for SFP funding transfers and use, and revised public finance laws, aiming to minimize the delay of public fund transfer at the start of the fiscal and school year. The new guidelines enabled municipalities to receive funding earlier in the school year, with funds being provided to SFP Management Teams (*Ekipa Jestaun Programa Merenda Eskolár*, or EJP) that are essentially community groups in charge of the procurement, preparation, and distribution of school meals. The GOTL also increased the overall allocation for meals from \$0.25/child to \$0.42/child.²⁵ The GOTL rolled out the new guidelines and funding in early 2023.

Inflation and climate events had major negative impacts on food security in Timor-Leste between 2023 and 2024. Overall, 27% of Timorese faced acute food insecurity between

²⁵ Out of which \$0.35 are allocated for food purchases and \$0.07 for administrative costs.

November 2023 and April 2024 as El Niño-driven weather conditions exacerbated food security during the lean season.²⁶ In early 2024, rising inflation increased food prices by 6.4% in relation to the previous year.²⁷ As households struggle to purchase food, in particular rural families dependent on subsistence agriculture who had poor harvests in 2023-2024, school meals were an increasingly critical safety net in terms of food and nutrition security.

These conditions also affected the cost of school meals and the ability to purchase costly protein-rich foods to ensure nutritional value and ameliorate gaps in household consumption of protein. However, findings from this study show that targeted schools have managed to maintain the provision of meals despite the surge in enrolment and attendance, and most importantly, are providing diverse and nutritionally rich meals to students.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The results show that many of the gains resulting from HATUTAN's implementation have been sustained and in fact continued on their upward trajectory of improvement since the program ceased its activities in Liquica one year prior to this study. The sharp increase in enrolment, continued improvement in attendance rates, and universal access to nutritious school meals represent notable gains in relation to overall school conditions in 2018. Results show that nearly all schools are providing meals inclusive of protein-rich foods through the national SFP funds – a major change in relation to the baseline - when none of the schools were providing meals. In a context where students do not consume animal-origin protein on a regular basis, the provision of protein rich meals has provided a critical boost to children's nutritional needs and spurred positive physical and cognitive development.

100% of schools are providing meals, with 91% including protein-rich foods and 64% green leafy vegetables; this is a major change in dietary diversity and nutritional status for children targeted by HATUTAN.

Teachers have continued to implement improved literacy teaching practices, expanding the use of individual reading since the final evaluation. However, book lending has declined, requiring additional emphasis on the importance of exposure to reading material beyond classroom time.

Classroom practices have continued to become more gender-equitable after the intervention ended.

While gender gaps persist, those have declined systematically since the baseline and continued to decline after the final evaluation. However, there is a need to ensure that gender disparities are not exacerbated as enrolment increases and so does the competition for school resources – including desks,

textbooks, supplies, etc. The use of verbal and physical violence has declined, showing increased teacher awareness of national policies banning both.

Despite those remarkable gains, some areas require continued reinforcement by the MoE. The use of formative assessments and the proportion of teachers engaging non-participating

²⁶ [IPC Acute Food Insecurity Analysis November 2023-September 2024](#), pg.1, published in February 2024.

²⁷ National Institute of Statistics and Ministry of Finance, *Consumer Price Index April 2024*, pg.2.

students have declined over time. These areas are particularly critical at the moment: as enrolment and attendance rates increase, so does the need to identify and support vulnerable students in a timely manner to prevent dropout.

Hygiene practices have improved over time, but major gaps remain. The availability of handwashing stations with soap remains low, and a third of the students are not washing their hands before meals. Additionally, the proportion of toilets used exclusively by girls has declined over time, potentially due to increased enrolment numbers forcing the use of toilets by both girls and boys. Again, these findings point to the need of urgent action to prevent illness-related absenteeism and dropout among older girls. The engagement of PTAs has also declined over time. The limited access to school grants hinders school capacity to purchase supplies (including soap and stationery, among others) and reduces community-driven improvements in infrastructure (such as repairing and constructing toilets).

The results show that all savings groups set up by HATUTAN have remained active, with healthy savings and loans portfolios and strong female representation in membership and savings. However, over 40% of the groups have faced challenges with members defaulting on loans. Over 60% of the VSLAs have continued to receive support from Community Development Agents after the end of the intervention, with most members (86%) continuing to contribute savings after share-out. The results demonstrate the sustainability of the model in a context of rising inflation and climate-related challenges.

Despite rising inflation and extreme weather events, all VSLAs have remained functional, with 86% of the members contributing savings.

Overall, the findings suggest that HATUTAN's interventions at school, community, and system level have been successful in fostering change in the quality and coverage of school meals, boosting enrolment and attendance for at least one year after the end of the project. HATUTAN's interventions on literacy instructional practices have also largely been sustained. The results suggest that similar interventions are likely to be sustained over time, particularly when supported by policy changes (as in the case of the SFP) and continued reinforcement by MOE and municipal education authorities (e.g., on literacy and attendance).